

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 644

EA 020 821

AUTHOR Lane, William C., Jr.
TITLE The Discipline of Discipline.
PUB DATE Feb 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (New Orleans, LA, February 24-28, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Discipline; Junior High Schools; *Participative Decision Making; *Policy Formation; Punishment; *School Effectiveness; *Student Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS *Florida (Fort Meyers)

ABSTRACT

The discipline of discipline is the cornerstone upon which educators should build the other disciplines. Teaching responsibility for one's actions must stand beside the teaching of writing, reading, and arithmetic. Discipline cannot be mastered when stifled with negative reward systems and punishment. This paper describes a comprehensive discipline policy developed by Dunbar Middle School in Fort Meyers, Florida, a racially mixed, lower middle class community. In fall 1985, a committee comprised of the assistant principal, several teachers, and a guidance counselor drafted a discipline plan based on choices and consequences (adapted from Lee Canter's discipline system). The plan outlines acceptable and unacceptable behavior and positive and negative consequences. Since students choose their behavior, they must have clear, concise guidelines, combined with fair and consistent consequences. All teachers follow the same system of three warnings, sending a notice to parents on the third warning. Students are sent to a time-out room on their fourth and each subsequent decision to disregard a rule. The time-out room is a place where students examine their behavior, explore options, and strengthen their skills in basic content areas. Other program features are explained at length. Data collected during three consecutive school years suggest that the new plan has been very effective in fostering responsible behavior choice. Discipline referrals dropped from 316 to 169 between February 1986 and February 1988. Discipline is no longer equated with punishment, but is a regular part of the school's curriculum. (MLH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED306644

The Discipline of Discipline

by

William C. Lane Jr.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*William C.
Lane, Jr.*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Assistant Principal
Dunbar Middle School
3800 E. Edison Ave.
Ft. Myers, Florida 33916
813-334-1357

3733 SE 12th Avenue
Cape Coral, Florida 33904
813-549-1498

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of
Secondary School Principals, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 24-28, 1989.

EA 020821

Where is it said that discipline should be punishment? Where did this idea of equating discipline with punishment arise? When we speak of the discipline of English, or the discipline of Social Studies, or the discipline of Science, we think of teaching and learning the basics of the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Equally so, when we think of the discipline of Discipline, we must also think of teaching and learning the fourth R, responsibility. Just as we focus on all the academic and vocational disciplines in our schools, we need to focus on the discipline of Discipline. We need to allow this "discipline" to be taught during the school day just like the other disciplines.

The discipline of Discipline is the cornerstone upon which we as educators should build the other disciplines. Teaching responsibility for one's own actions must stand beside the teaching of writing, reading, and arithmetic. It must stand beside the culinary domains of home economics, the affective domains of health, the physical domains of PE, the kinesthetic domains of industrial arts, the harmonic domains of music, and the aesthetic domains of art.

Schools are geared to allow children to grow in academic, fine arts, and vocational disciplines. Yet the one discipline we expect our children to master from kindergarten through twelfth grade, we as educators stifle with negative reward systems and

punishment. Our prisons and street corners are filled with men and women who came up through schools that emphasized discipline as punishment and subsequently all other disciplines became a frustration. Being responsible for one's actions is a basic premise of life. We are the sum total of all our choices up to this moment. And each of our choices has brought positive, negative, social, emotional, physical, and/or psychological consequences. Yet our schools choose to ignore this basic building block of life.

It is the author's belief that effective discipline is an integral part of an effective school. Discipline is a skill to be taught rather than a punishment to be applied. Thus, an effective school incorporates many of the strategies employed in teaching other disciplines into a comprehensive program designed to foster self-discipline and responsibility in all students.

Dunbar Middle School in Fort Myers, Florida is one such school focusing on the discipline of Discipline. The school is part of the rapidly growing Lee County School System with a student population pushing 40,000. The school system has 7 high schools, 11 middle schools, and 30 elementary schools.

Dunbar Middle School sits in a racially mixed, lower socio-economic community. The bulk of the 430 student population are average, hard-working children. Over 75 percent of the

students are on free or reduced lunch. Approximately 22 percent of the student population live with both natural parents and 38 percent live with a single parent.

Throughout the early 1980's, it became quite evident to the staff of the school that a comprehensive school-wide discipline policy was needed. A turnover of administration in the 85-86 school year included a commitment to fair, consistent, school-wide discipline. Teachers participated in group activities to determine basic needs and possible guidelines with regard to the discipline issue. This process resulted in the formation of a discipline committee composed of the assistant principal, team leaders from each grade level, plus two additional teachers and the guidance counselor.

The discipline committee met twice in October, 1985, to devise a discipline plan based on the needs and strategies presented in small groups and faculty meetings. In late October, a rough draft of the entire discipline plan was presented to the faculty. Small groups were again formed to evaluate the policy and propose changes.

The discipline committee convened to consider the suggestions generated by these groups. Changes were incorporated into the plan and it was finalized for typing. This revised form was presented in late November to the faculty and met with unanimous approval.

While the dates and the number of meetings held are not particularly important, the process of developing the plan is the key to its success. The administration could have single-handily devised a school-wide discipline plan that would have been very similar to the plan actually implemented. It would have likely met with immediate opposition from those faculty members who might feel that the plan was being imposed upon them. This could also generate resentment from those teachers who might view the plan as an infringement on their own rights and responsibilities to maintain classroom discipline. By developing the plan as a joint project of faculty and administration, these negative reactions were circumvented. All were involved in the development of the plan, so everyone had an investment to protect by seeing that the plan was successful. Implementation of the plan began in January, 1986.

The plan is based on choices and consequences and is adapted from assertive discipline by Lee Cantor. The discipline committee reviews the plan each nine week grading period and revises it on a yearly basis as needs arise. The plan outlines acceptable and non-acceptable behavior as well as positive and negative consequences for a student's choice of behavior.

The staff at Dunbar Middle School believes that a student chooses his/her behavior. In order to make an intelligent decision, the student must have clear, concise guidelines

combined with fair and consistent consequences. Each student receives a personal copy of the discipline plan, including a glossary so the student has a clear understanding of the words used in the plan. A parent signature page assures the administration that the parents have at least seen the plan. The assistant principal teaches the plan to all students at the beginning of each school year.

Unanimous staff support has allowed the discipline committee to revise and perfect the plan to its current form. Consistency is the rule at Dunbar Middle School. The same set of rules are posted in each classroom. All teachers follow the same system of three warnings with a notice to the parents on the third warning. Students are sent to the time-out room on their fourth and each subsequent choice to disregard a rule. The beginning of school is a learning period so students who have received warnings or have gone to time out begin again with a "clean slate" after three weeks. The plan then runs the rest of the nine week grading period. After each subsequent nine week quarter, students are given a chance to start fresh.

The faculty did not want students to be doing classwork or homework in the time-out room as this could actually serve to reward negative behavior. While some schools require that students write sentences, paragraphs, or essays while in time-out, Dunbar's faculty and administration vetoed this approach. It was the general consensus that using writing as a

punishment would lead to further frustration and disillusionment with school. It seemed that a school committed to teaching the discipline of Discipline could change the focus of "time-out" from punishment to yet another strategy for learning. It is the philosophy of the faculty that the children who end up in the time-out room are those most deficient in the basic skills and thus the most frustrated students in the school. The dilemma was studied by yet another committee and the result was our current "basic skills package".

Each student who is sent to the time-out room is given a basic skills package. Each package begins with a series of questions derived from the discipline plan which encourage the student to consider his/her behavior and the consequences of that behavior. The student then moves into reading comprehension, social studies, science vocabulary, and math. Each package requires approximately two visits to complete and includes time for the student to grade his/her work with the use of an answer key. The time-out room has become a place where students examine their behavior, explore their options, and strengthen their skills in basic content areas.

There are graduated consequences as visits to the time-out room increase. On the fourth visit a student is referred to the guidance counselor. If the student chooses to visit the time-out room a fifth time, he/she is assigned internal suspension for one day. A student serving internal suspension for a day is assigned

a comprehensive basic skills package designed to cover a day's work. Each additional visit results in one day external suspension at home and an ensuing parent conference is scheduled upon the student's return to school. This sixth step in the discipline plan has been reached by no more than five students during any nine week grading period.

The comprehensive discipline plan includes rules to cover areas not applicable to the classroom. The rules and consequences are worded in such a fashion that a child has a choice whether to follow a given rule or to disregard it. Since the plan is in writing and the parents have to sign it, students and parents are informed of the consequences for the various possible behavioral choices. The options of warning, counseling, lunchroom detention, internal and external suspensions are utilized as consequences. Corporal punishment is not used at Dunbar Middle School. This adherence to "non-use" of corporal punishment, utilization of our written discipline plan, and a positive incentive system for making proper choices reinforces our school mission of "academic excellence and personal growth in a caring environment". The accuracy of the school's belief that our young people can make appropriate choices when the school's expectations are clearly taught and consistently and fairly administered is continually being proven by a dramatic decrease in behavior problems.

If it can be assumed that incidents of discipline referrals are

indicative of the student's adherence to discipline guidelines, it would seem that a lower level of these referrals would reflect a greater number of appropriate behavioral choices. Data collected during three consecutive school years suggests that Dunbar Middle School's comprehensive discipline plan has been very effective in fostering responsible behavioral choices. The actual number of referrals significantly diminished with the implementation of a school-wide discipline plan. This lower level of discipline problems has been maintained over a two year period. The following chart provides data to support our philosophy of teaching the discipline of Discipline:

DATE	NUMBER OF REFERRALS
November, 1985	595
* February, 1986	316
November, 1986	144
February, 1987	202
November, 1987	151
February, 1988	169

* one month after the plan was initiated

In addition, it is important to note that in 1985-86, 249 students were administered corporal punishment. No students were administered corporal punishment over the last two school years. Also, the external suspension rate was 18.4 percent lower during the 87-88 school year than the previous year.

Teaching discipline as a skill has resulted in fewer discipline

related school problems. This approach is encouraging the development of responsible students who are able to connect their choices with subsequent consequences. In place of punishment, students who make inappropriate behavioral choices report to a time-out room in which basic skills packages are utilized to foster growth in areas of self-discipline as well as reading, science, math, and social studies content areas. At Dunbar Middle School, discipline is no longer equated with punishment, it is now a regular part of our instructional curriculum.